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To Messrs. Booi and Tromp,  
My best wishes always,  
Yolanda  
5/28/69

THE ARUBAN HOUSE

Yolanda Theunissen

Prof. Malefijt - History, Theory, and Method

Prof. Bendix - Language and Culture

This paper deals with the pre-Lago Aruban volkswoning as it exists today. The first part gives the materials used in the construction of the house, differences of style, and ornamentation (if any). The second part deals with the part of the house within the walls; its floor plan and interior decoration, and the terms used for it. My descriptions of the interior furnishings are of those found in the home today, which differ from the furniture used when the home was first built. At times I would be fortunate enough to chance upon an indigenous piece, like a chair made of cactuswood, very similar to the 'stul di soya' illustrated on page 53 in Volkskunde van Curacao. But these finds were rare and I realized it would be difficult to reconstruct the furniture solely on descriptions. Therefore, I centered my study on the present arrangement of furniture, its similarities and variations, dictated by custom and individual tastes. The floor plan, as I have acknowledged otherwise, are those of houses I visited and sketched. These houses were all built round the turn of the century, and their style is no longer used in the construction of houses today.

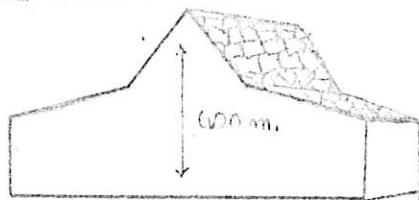
## Part I.

The first houses on Aruba were Indian dwellings, having walls of a wattle and loam construction, door and window frames made from cactus wood, and roofs of straw (corn). Though these types of buildings are still to be found, they are for the most part uninhabited. If in use, it is usually as a storage room for crops or tools, or as animal sheds.

The house I studied is the koopmanshuis, also called the <sup>The</sup> Cunuc house. This is very similar to the loamhouse in style and room division, but differs in that it is built on a larger scale and is constructed of more solid materials. The house rests on a cement base, set above ground. The walls are made of fitted limestone pieces, the cracks filled with smaller pieces and a loam mixture. Both the inside and outside walls are coated with mortar, and then finished with white plaster. Today, bright colors with an oil base have replaced the white plaster. The roof is tiled with imported Dutch tiles. Because the tiles needed for repair are no longer manufactured, the tiled roofs are frequently replaced by corrugated asbestos sheets. Imported Columbian wood was used in the construction of beams and frames. The ovens extended almost the complete length of one side of the kitchen wall, and are equal to the wall in height, and are about three feet in depth. Today these ovens are usually no longer in use, and have either been sealed off altogether, or are used as storage closets.

Concrete watertanks of varied size and depth, which either extend from a wall or are free standing, were necessary until the installation of water pipes, which was begun in 1932. The water collected in the tanks now, is used mainly for the household gardens.

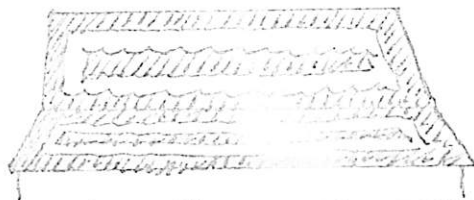
There are two basic house styles; the major differences are in the construction of the roof and side walls. The most common type has side walls which slope up to a point. (average of 600 meters - Nijdam, page 36.) The roof extends from wall to wall and has no sides of its own.



The other style has box-like walls of an even height on all sides. (average of 300 meters - Nijdam, page 36.) The roof sits on top of the walls and has front, back and side parts. This type of house varies its size by duplicating itself. Both styles have walls from one to three feet thick.



Ornamentation comes in many different forms. The bright colors of the walls, shutters and doors is the most striking visually. More subtle are the white tiles patterned in rectangles on the roofs. But ornamentation also has architectural manifestations;

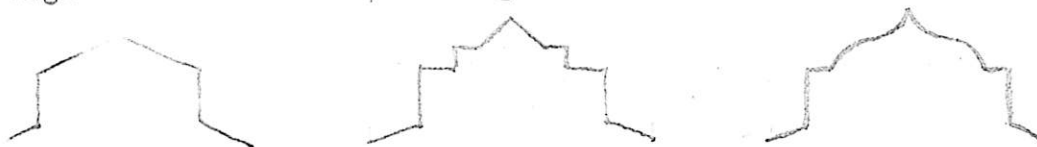


example of this are the pre-cement decorations on the rooftops. The name given

these projections is 'cables di dak di cas', the gloss of which is 'the head of the roof of the house'. The house style with the high sides has the ornaments on the peak of the sides. (figure 1.) The four-sided roof style has the ornaments at the point of intersection of the front, back and sides of the roof. (figure 2.) If the house has ornaments it is limited to two of the same design; if the house is of the duplicating kind, it will have two sets of ornaments, but again of the same design.

The following illustrations show the progression of simple to more complex designs in the 'cables di dak di cas':

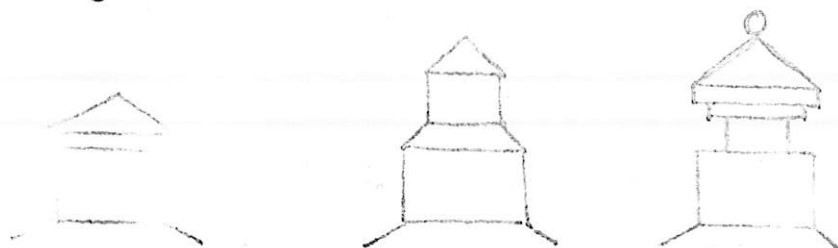
design      broad based triangle



design 2. pyramid base



design      elaborations on house motifs



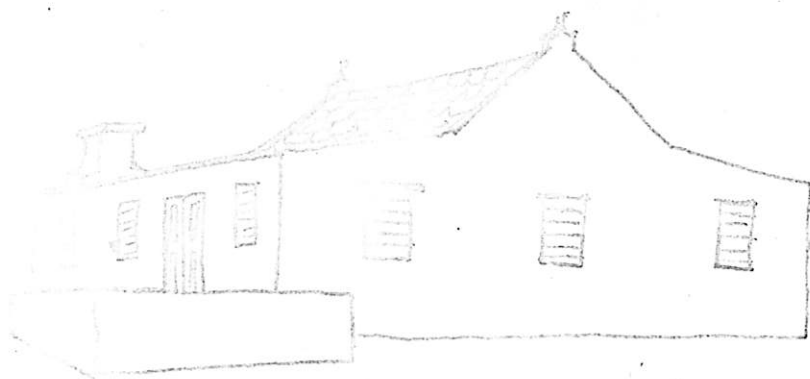


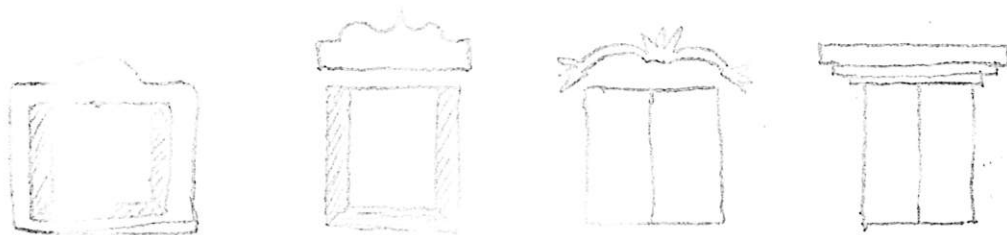
Figure 1. Showing facade, water-tank, and roof ornamentations



Figure 2. Showing house resting on cement base, stove and roof ornamentation. Roof is of corrugated asbestos sheets.

Another form of ornamentation is the 'floriamentu di cas', which refers to the cement relief frieze and pillar design. The frieze follows the line of the roof, below the gutter, and the pillars accent the corners of the house and sometimes divide the sections between windows or doors. The most common figures are flowers and stars, but various designs developed with the various masons who used it.

This form of house adornment dates back to the 1850'ties, when it was first introduced in Aruba by Pimon Donati, who preferred the cartouche motif, still to be found on some houses. Though it is often obscured by having been painted the same color as the walls of the house. This design is usually found over doors and windows.



is the names of two masons, but unfortunately was not able to talk to either one. However I did learn the methods each used from descriptions given by the daughter of Ignatio Ras, and the wife of Bonifacio Henricus. Ignatio Ras made his molds from zinc plates, which he would place on damp cement and then trace. He would then fill in the traced pattern with cement, and tag it on the wall. Till six years ago he still worked in this method. Mrs. Goldman-Ras, his daughter, pointed out a chair in his home which had been made by local carpen-



ter twenty - three years ago. It has a 'floriamento' design carved in its back, but she did not know whether the mason had gotten the idea for a new mold from the chair, or the carpenter from a wall. (figure 3.)



Mrs. Henricus explained that her husband's method for applying the 'floriamento' was to cut a design in cardboard, space it on the wall and trace the design, and then apply cement to the still damp cement wall on the traced pattern. Both masons accented their designs by painting them in two different colors, usually contrasting light and dark, which both differed from the color of the house itself.

The distribution of this adornment is limited to the area of Sabana Basora and Poz Chikito. There was one such house in Oranjestad which has since been razed. The reason for absence of this sort of decoration in city is said to be that the town's people found it too frivolous.

On the three following pages I have drawn three 'cas floria' and their designs. These houses can be found on the road from Santa Cruz to Frenchman's Pass.

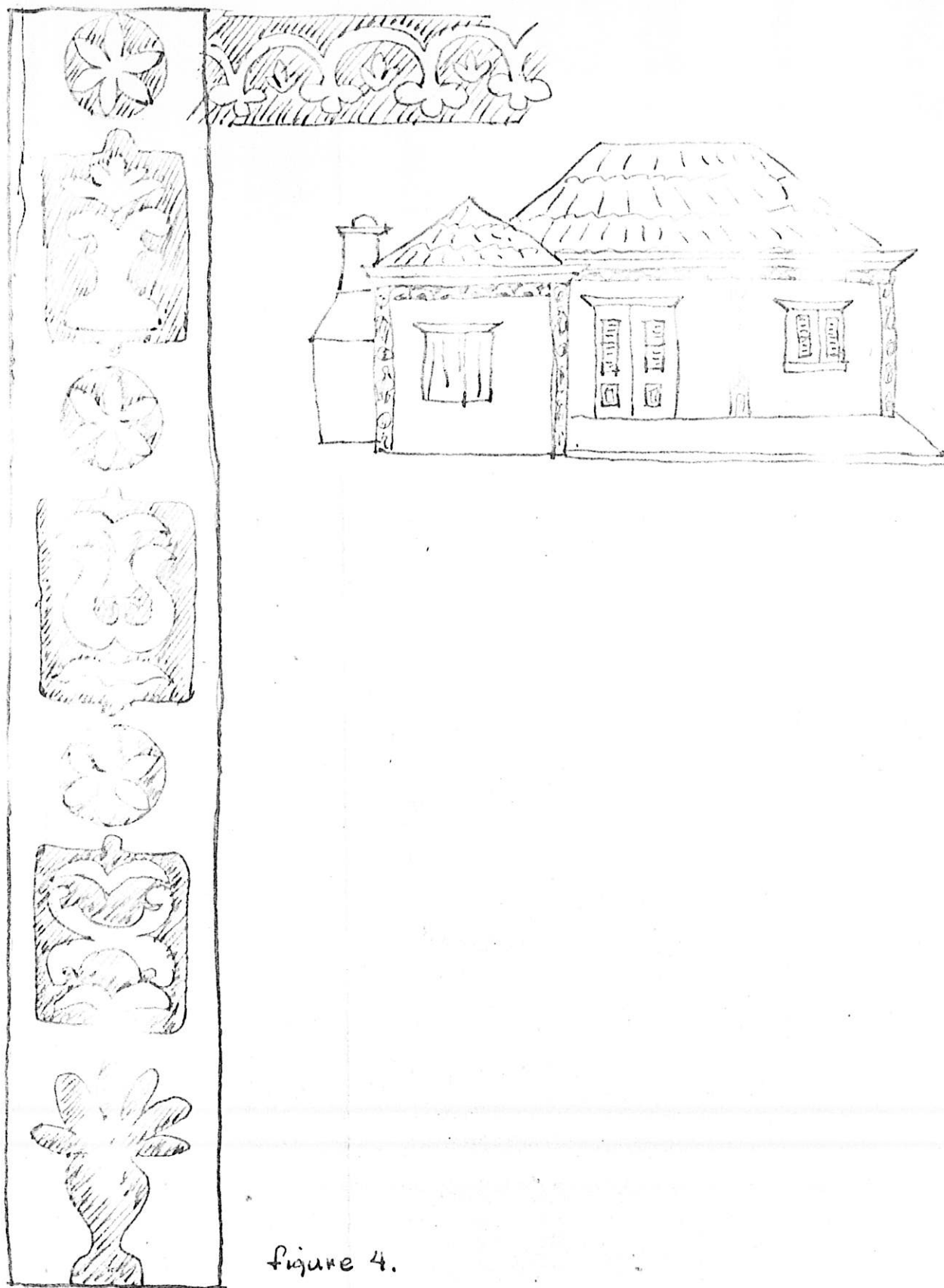


figure 4.

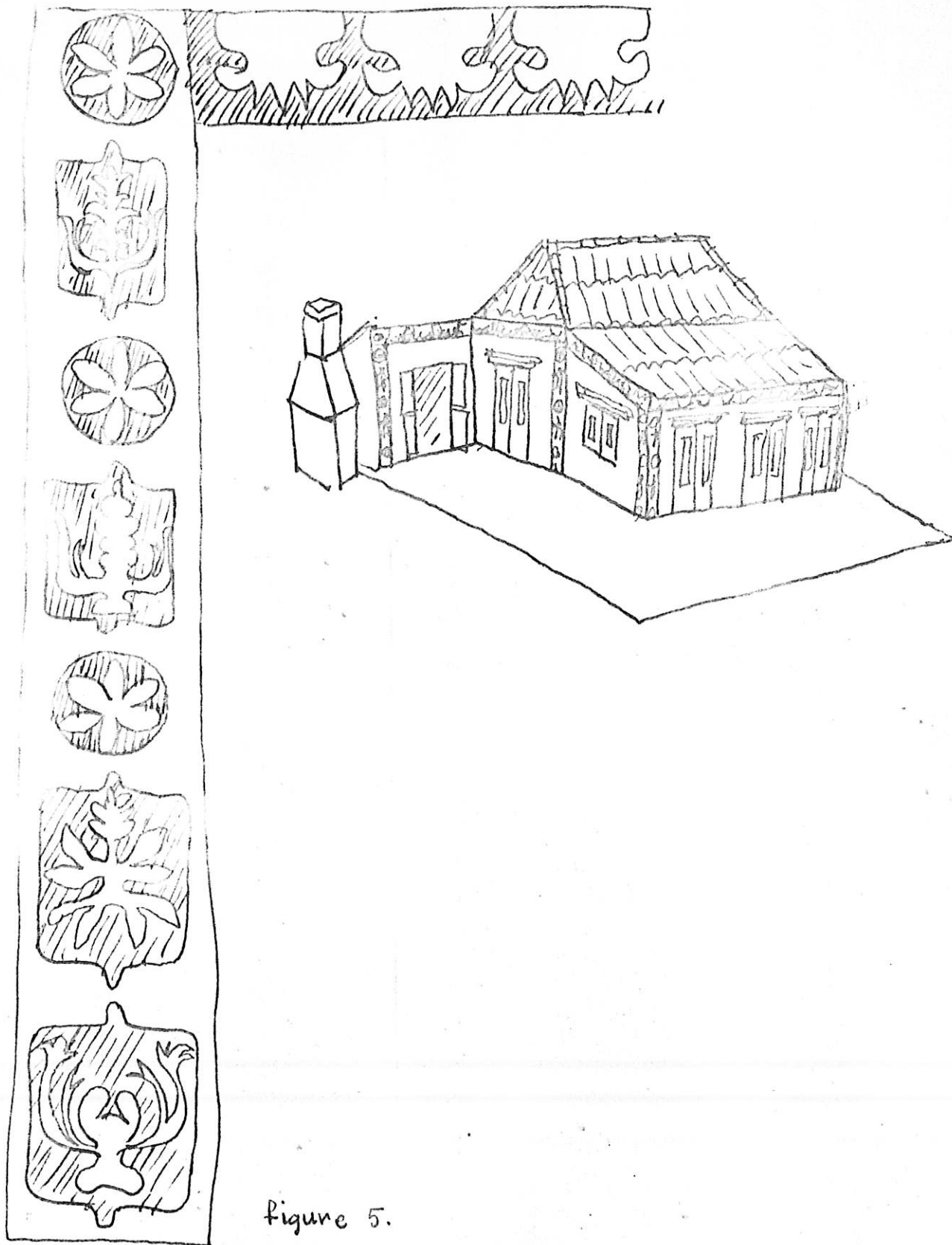


Figure 5.

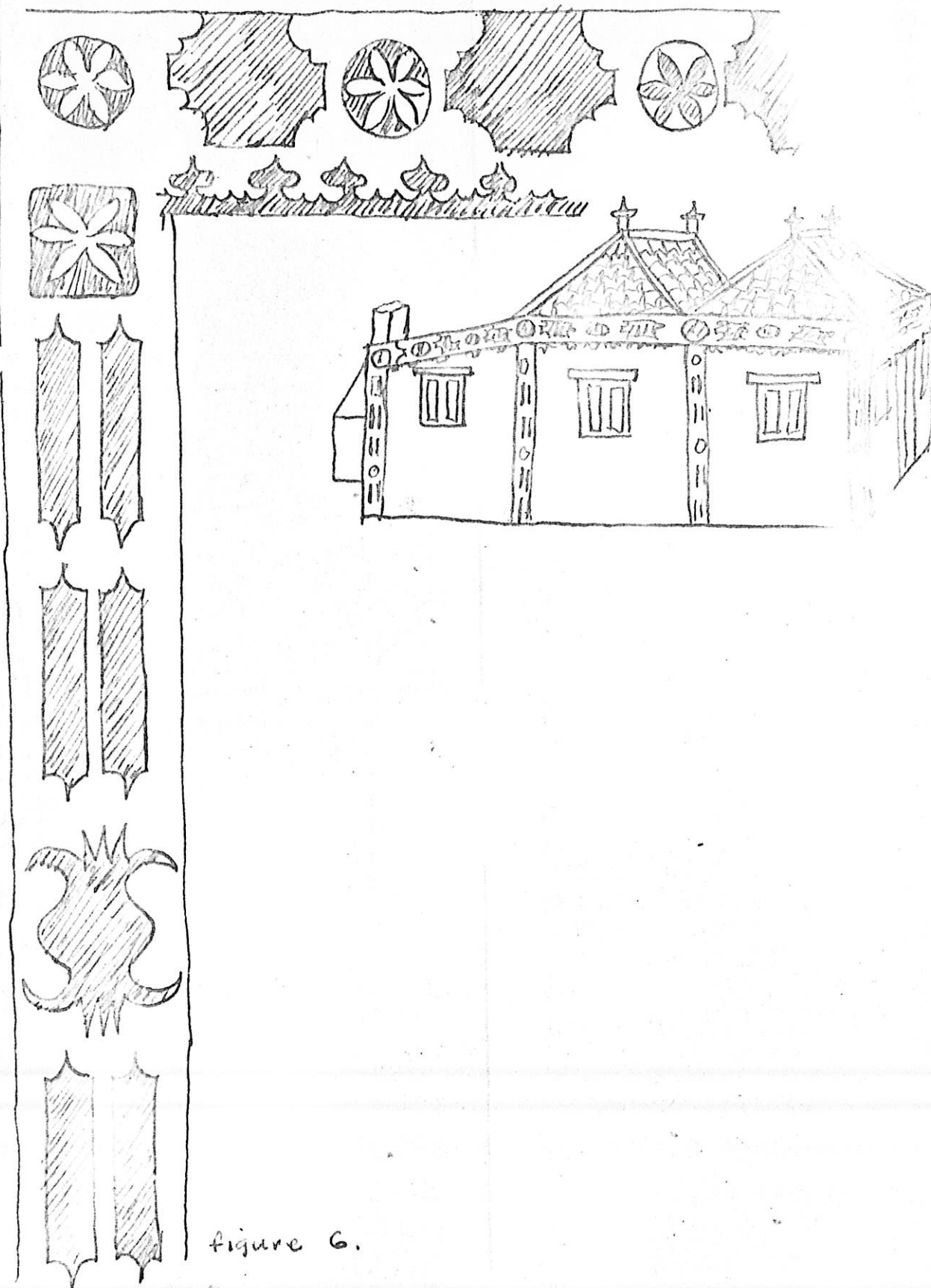


figure 6.

The designs for the 'floriamento' then are the mason's own creations. The other day someone suggested the idea that that the designs are based on the artists' conception of Indian Indian designs. It would have been interesting to see if there is a visual similarity between the two. Unfortunately it was suggested too late in the term, and I cannot include a study on this connection of the designs. (if any) However I am drawing some Indian drawings which I have found to date.



## Part II.



The first room one enters in the Aruban house is the ante Sala, more commonly known as 'hadrei'. It is in this room that 'hin-destranjo' or people one does not know well yet are entertained. As friendship develops the guest is taken to the second room, called the 'sala'. This room also functions as the room where the family gathers since the television set is usually kept there. For most of the day, the family lives in the kitchen area, at the back of the house. And it is through the kitchen door that good friends enter informally. The rooms are divided by walls, some of which are of wood, called 'muraia di palu', and these only extend to the edge of the outer walls. This leaves a space between the walls and the roof or ceiling, which allows the air to move from room to room. If there are ceilings, they are of long thin slats of wood, painted white or yellow.

The floors are either cement, or tiled. In some homes the cement floors are covered with linolium to lessen the intensity of the coldness. The sala may have a rug.

Most houses have one to two bedrooms called, 'kamber'. Although the original blue print did not allow for a bathroom within the house, most have converted or attached a baño in some part of the house.

Within the house itself there are very few doors to the different rooms. Perhaps the 'kamber' or 'bano' will have one, but for the most part the doorways are completely open or have a piece of cloth called 'panja di porta', dividing the two rooms.

A comparison of five houses, chosen at random, to show the variation of basic outside features of the Aruban house:

			veranda	oven	water tank	roof	roof	casa	2 part	color of	doors & shutters
									door	house	
1.	yes		yes	no	no	tile	yes	no	no	yellow & white	brown & beige
2.		yes	yes	yes	yes	asbestos sheets	no	no	yes	apricot	white & green
3.	yes		no	yes	yes	asbestos sheets	no	yes	no	yellow	red & white
4.	yes		yes	yes	yes	tile	yes	yes	no	yellow & lime	green & white
5.		yes	yes	yes	yes	asbestos sheets	no	no	yes	milk chocolate brown	beige brown

In the last column, 'color of doors and shutters', the first color refers to the base color, and the second to the trim - usually a rectangular pattern, concentric to the shape of the door or shutter.

House number 4 had one more variation, in that it had a white rectangle painted on the tiled roof.



Below and on the following page are four flore plans which I chose<sup>because</sup> they differed in room arrangement. They are not accurate in scale and the bedrooms are based on guesswork, judging their size according to the walls surrounding them.

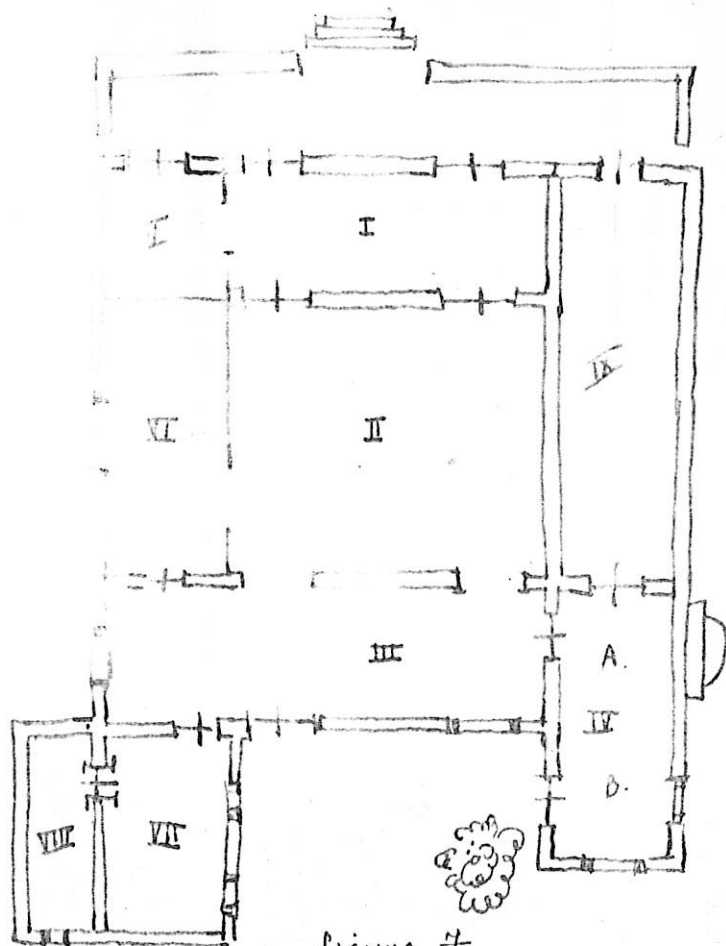
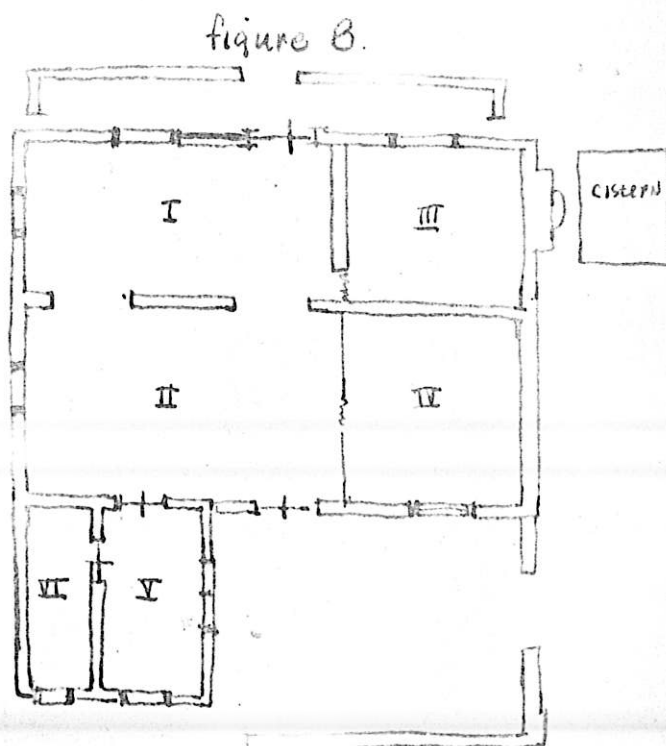


figure 7.

- I+I = doorway
- = window
- I = hadrei
- II = sala
- III = comedon
- IV = A. old kitchen 'kushina'
- B. new kitchen       "
- V = Kamber
- VI = Kamber
- VII = Kamber
- VIII = baño
- IX = garage

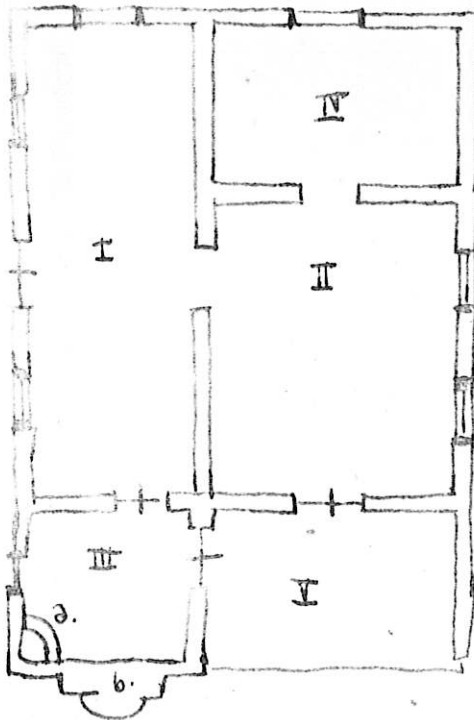
- I = hadrei
- II = sala
- III = kushina
- IV = Kamber
- V = Kamber
- VI = BAKO



CISERPIS



Figure 9.



== = windows

+ = doors

I = hadrei

II = sala

III = kuchina

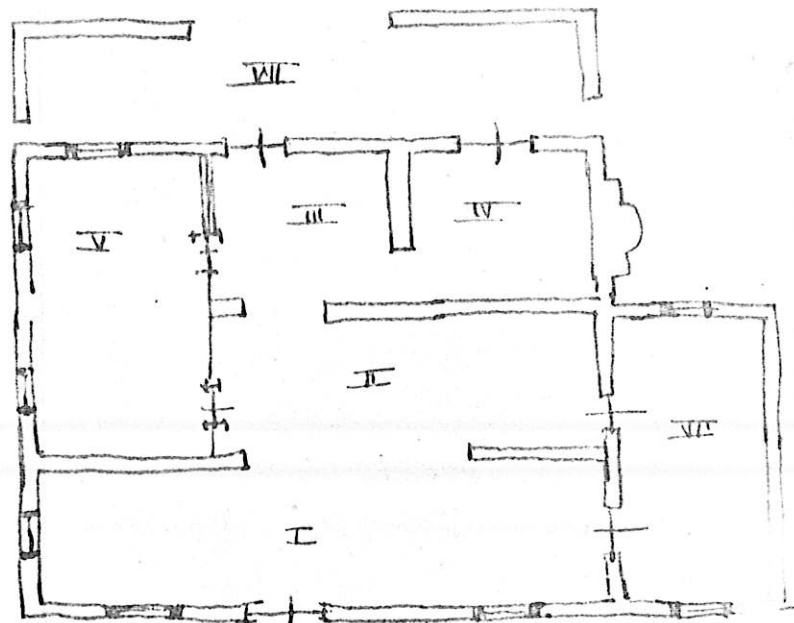
b. water-storage tank

a. fire place and chimney

IV = kamber

V = veranda

Figure 10.



I = hadrei

II = sala

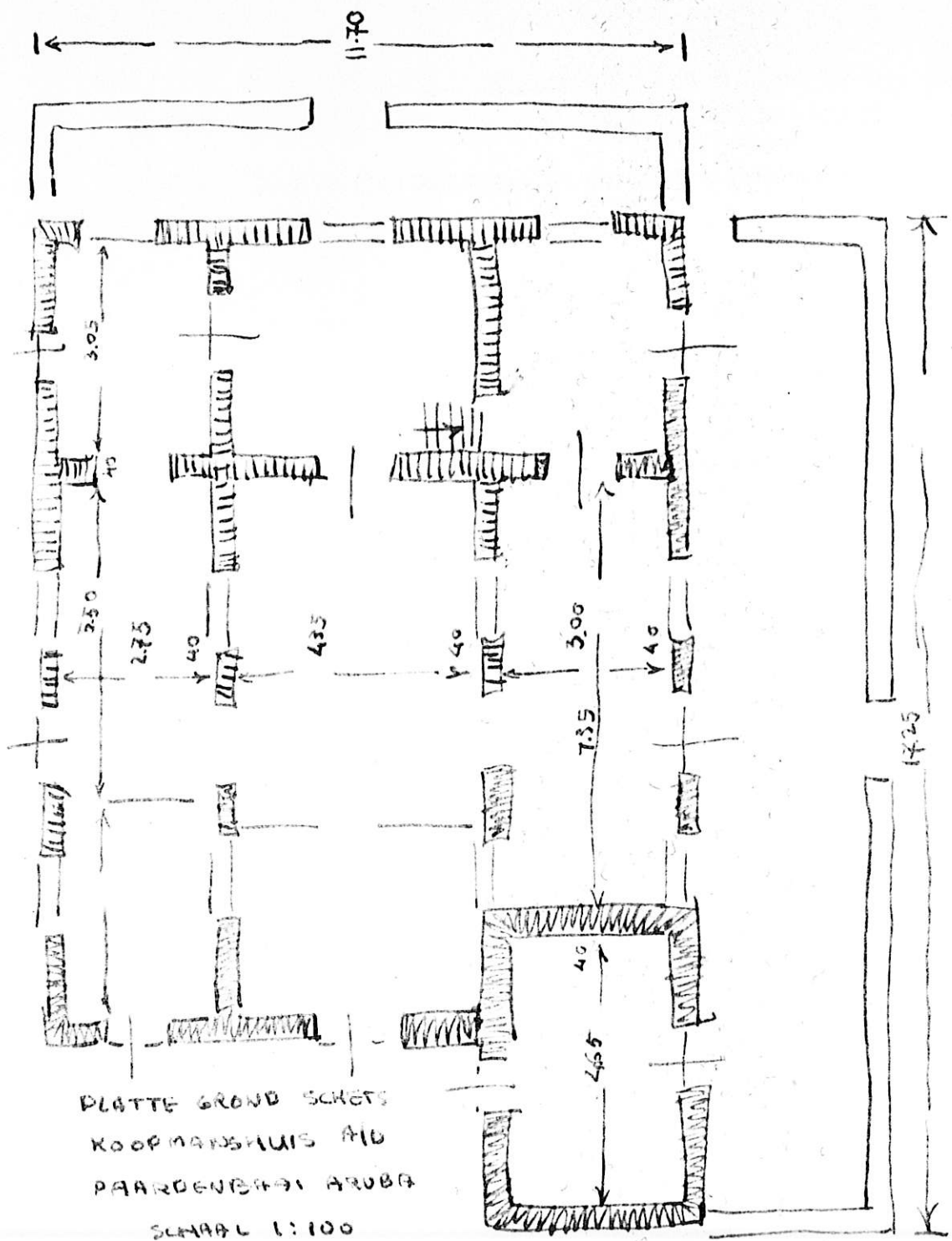
III = komedor

IV = kuchina

V = kamber

VI = kamber

VII = veranda



Copy of page 32 in th. Nijdam - Het woonhuis op Aruba.

There are several furniture sets, and although their name indicates their location, often this is not the case. A 'set di sala' consists of sofa, and three to four chairs. Because the rooms of the house are often too small to accomodate the large modern pieces, one of the chairs has often been moved to the hadrei. The hadrei itself is often a conglomeration of several pieces from different sets. The old 'set di sala' made of wood, and cabana is usually to be found in the hadrei. This move however does not mean a change in name to indicate its new location. Sometimes the portronal is moved to the veranda.

As Steenmeijer points out, "A family's prosperity is reflected in the furnishings of the home. The large number of chairs is striking." (Food and Nutrition of Arubans, page 32.) Basically a chair is a 'stul di sinta', meaning to sit. If the chair is part of a 'set di kushina', the modern chrome and formaica style, which is placed in the hadrei, it is called 'set di comedor'. The deciding factor is that the entire set is there and is used as a dining set, even though it may not be in the room designated for that function. Now if the chair were moved by itself to the hadrei it would be referred to as a 'stul di kushina', as they are advertised in the stores. If a chair of an actual 'set di comedor', meaning that it is made of wood, and was part of a set with table and sideboard which had been placed in the comedor, found its way to the hadrei, it is called either 'stul di sinta' or 'Stul di hadrei', but not 'stul di comedor'. Since it is no longer used in that connection.

Illustrated below is the floor plan of a hadrei and sala, to show the great number of chairs and their location in the rooms. In this case, the original older 'set di sala' had been moved entirely to the hadrei to make room for the heavier modern set.

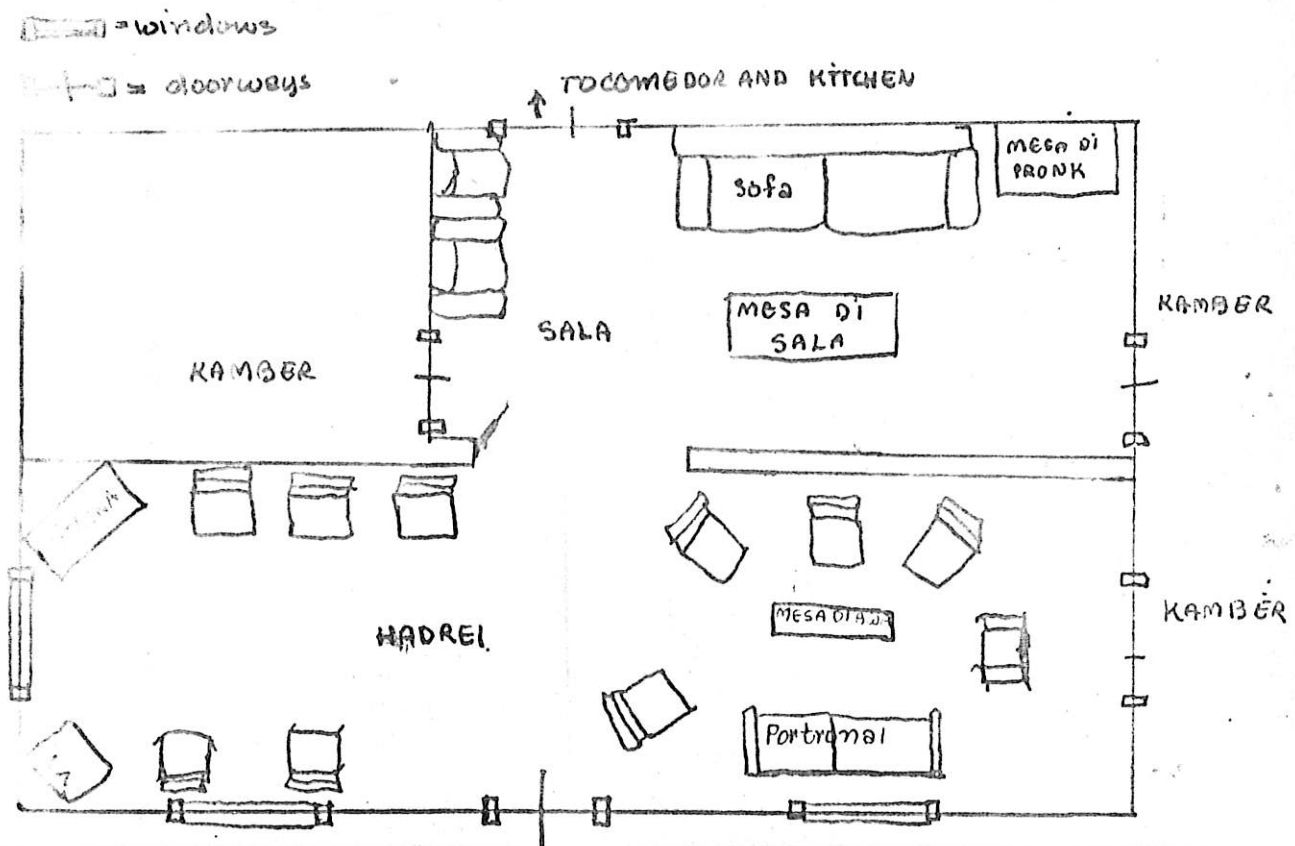


figure 11.

The 'mesa di awa' of the older 'set di sala' undergoes the same change of names as its function changes. When it is replaced by the more modern 'mesa di sala', which functions as a table to serve things on, and it is moved against a wall, either in the sala itself or in the hadrei, it is called 'messa di pronk'. By definition pronk means in the abstract sense, "show ostentation"; in the concrete sense, "finery." And that is the function of such a table in the corner or alongside the wall; to show the household's collection of bric-a-brac. Once the 'mesa di awa' is moved to such a position, it is quickly stacked with knickknacks and its new purpose is that of 'mesa di pronk', although it may not have been designed for that purpose.

Each home I visited had a good amount of bric-a-brac placed on every possible surface. The striking similarity was the symmetrical arrangement of the knickknacks in each home. The arrangements were proportioned in a hierarchy of size: large things in the back, and smaller alongside or in front. Each home has its statue of Christ or the Virgin Mary, they vary in size, but some are as high as the small tables they are perched on. Usually a vase or two with year-long flowers is placed beside the statue. Doiles are often placed underneath vases and figurines.

There also were 'horlogi di muraia' (of wallclocks) in each home I visited. I was told that these are for the most part gotten as wedding or anniversary gifts. Other gifts for such occasions

occasions include drinking glasses, large vases and statues of the saints.

Steenmeijer also writes that "the more well-to-do own a refrigerator and a radio, while a sewing-machine also figures frequently on the inventory." (Food and Nutrition of Arubans, page 32) I think that a television set could be safely added to the inventory. However, I did not see a sewing-machine in each of the homes I visited, but the reason may be its location in a room I was not able to see.



The following are a list of terms, their description, and if necessary, the slight variations which make them differ:

## DOORS and WINDOWS

### window - ~~wendana~~

1. ~~wendana~~ di glass
2. ~~wendana~~ di blat - solid pieces of wood on hinges which open completely
3. ~~wendana~~ di jalusi - moveable wooden or glass slats, which can regulate the flow of air and light

### door - porta

1. porta di blat - usually of two rectangular pieces of solid wood, opens vertically, used for entrance to the hadrei and/or sala
2. porta di jalusi - portion of moveable wooden or glass slats, usually upper portion of door
3. porta di blat i jalusi - combination of 2 & 3
4. porta di saja cu djeki - two pieces, hinged above each other, opening horizontally  
function: to keep out the backyard animals, while at same time have upper portion open to let in light and air  
usually door of the kushina

On Curacao 'porta di saja cu djeki' is called "Saja koe jaki", (van Meeteren, page 24.) Both terms literally translated mean, skirt and shirt door.

### curtain - kortina

<u>name</u>	<u>where found</u>	<u>description</u>
kortina	above windows and doorways in every room	-can be short, not longer than one foot, gathered above the opening - in more modern homes, the length of the window, and -in that case not used above doorway
panja di porta	in doorways, inside the house	-rectangular piece of floor-length cloth, covering the entrance to rooms within the house

furniture for storage:

<u>name</u>	<u>where found</u>	<u>description</u>
kashi chikito or bireauchi	kamber	two to five drawers on short legs
toillete	kamber	kashi chikito with a mir- ror (spil) added above it.
kashi di paña	kamber	rectangular and high, two to three doors used to store clothes
kashi den muraya	kamber	same function and shape as the kashi di paña, only it is built into the wall
-----		
vitrina	sala and/or hadrei	rectangular shape, high glass front, function is to show things such as choice porcelain pieces
-----		
reki di comestible	kushina	closet to store food (may be the built in stove)
baki di ko'i kibra	kushina	for dishes, special rack in top portion for plates

'baki di ko'i kibra', contraction of kos di kibra, the gloss  
of which is 'place for things that break'

Coverings:

tablecloth tafellak	kushina, and/or comedor	cotton cloth or oilcloth on table when in use, as for eating or preparing things
tafelkleed or panja di messa	comedor	of a more fragile and expen- sive material than the tafellak, placed on table when not used



<u>name</u>	<u>where found</u>	<u>description</u>
floor covering: linolie	any room of the house, but usually limited to the sala and/or the hadrei	linoleum, used especially in homes with cement floors because it lessens the coldness
tapeit	sala	soft carpet comes either in size of room or as area rug, not seen frequently
mat	kamber, baño and by doorways	smaller in size than the tapeit, it is also of a coarser fiber
-----		
chairs: stul di sala	sala	back and arm rests may be cushioned older style has seats of woven cabana
stul di sinta	comedor and/or hadrei	made of wood no arm rests
stul di comedor	comedor	made of wood, or stainless steel, etc. higher back than stul di sinta no arm rests
stul di kushina	kushina	wooden tripod, like a milk-maids stool
stul di sociego: stul di soya'or wiegstul	hadrei and/or veranda	it rocks, made of wood comes in high and low backs with and without footrests and armrests
stul di veranda	veranda	bench, with or without back made of wood or cabana

<u>name</u>	<u>where found</u>	<u>description</u>
sofa: portronal	sala hadrei	bench-like in size (seats two comfortably) made of wood, seat and back often of cabana has arm rests
sofa	sala	cushioned, material covering frame low, has arm rests
-----		
tables: mesa di sala	sala	small and low can be any shape, round square, rectangular, must be free standing
mesa di awa	sala hadrei	2 1/2 to 3 feet high rectangular in shape has two wide legs for support
mesa di pronk	sala hadrei	low and small triangular or square in shape, placed in corners or againts walls
mesa di comedor	comedor kushina hadrei	rectangular made of wood, or formaica and stainless steel, alumi- num, etc. about 3feet in heigt dining table
mesa di kushina	kushina	this term applies to the more recent formaica and aluminum tables
mesa di nochi	kamber	low in height one drawer, thin legs placed near bed

List of Informants  
and  
Homes Visited

NAME	LOCATION OF HOUSE	DATE
Mrs. Vera	Lago Heights	February
Mr. & Mrs. Victor Pieters	Oranjestad	March 13 April 27
	Ayo	March 25 May 5
Mr. Jan Bezems	119 Bu Bali Road	May 4
Miss Lucy Carion	Oranjestad	May 4 & 7
Mrs. Harmen Maria Geerman-Ras	236 Santa Cruz	May 21
Mrs. Viola Henriques	32 Spaanslagoonweg	May 21

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